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SUBJECT: ANGOLA: GRA CELEBRATES WOMEN'S MONTH

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The role of women in Angolan society was a GRA focus during the month of March. The GRA organized workshops and seminars, conducted domestic violence awareness campaigns and carried out a special electoral registration campaign exclusively for women during March, using many of these events to also promote the work of the MPLA's women's civil society organization, the Organization of Angolan Women (OMA). Nonetheless, with female representation in Parliament and the Angolan cabinet at less than fifteen percent, Angola still has much work to do to meet its SADC commitments of thirty percent participation of women in Government, Parliament and the judiciary. End Summary.

Marco Mulher: March is Women's Month

¶2. (U) The GRA traditionally focuses on issues such as gender equity, poverty, domestic violence and other problems that affect women during the month of March. Dubbed &Marco Mulher, the GRA and its civil society partners also highlighted the role of women in society and government. In addition, Angola sent a high level delegation of women, led by Minister of Planning Ana Dias de Lorenzo, to participate in the International Conference on Women held in Spain on March 7th and 8th, 2007.

Getting out the Women's Vote

¶3. (U) In a tie-in to the voter registration campaign, and in response to a lower-than-anticipated rate of women registering to vote, the GRA offered registration days exclusively for women. March 8th, International Women's Day and a national holiday in Angola, was exclusively dedicated to the registration of women, and over 14,000 women voters were registered on the holiday. For the first time since the registration process began, stations were opened on Saturdays to give women additional opportunities to register. The government reported that over 80,000 women - mostly in Luanda - registered to vote during "Marco Mulher." (Note: Comparison data was not provided for women during previous months. End note.) Anecdotal reports from civil society registration observers state that registration stations were full of women on Saturdays, and that stations also began allowing men to register on Saturday's towards the end of the month. The GRA has said that efforts to register women and special registration opportunities will continue throughout the registration process, currently scheduled to end on June 15th, 2007.

Women's Month or OMAs Month?

¶4. (SBU) The Angolan Women's Association (OMA), which is also the women's arm of the MPLA, commemorates its founder's day on March 2, and uses the month of March to highlight its programs and encourage female participation in politics. Some opposition parties expressed resentment of what they perceived as the MPLA's monopoly on women's outreach. Female FNLA members complained to Poloff that the GRA devotes

more time, resources, and publicity to OMA's day than to Women's Day, and joked that "March isn't Women's month, its OMA's month."

¶5. (SBU) The newly-formed multi-party Forum of Female Politicians also had some difficulty in reaching out to women during Marco Mulher. The Forum was begun with the support of the International Republican Institute (IRI) in January 2007 as a means to strengthen women as a political force. It is comprised of representatives of all major and several smaller parties except for the MPLA. The MPLA has been invited to all of the Forum's events but has thus far declined to participate.

¶6. (SBU) The Forum applied for but was unable to secure permission from municipal governments to distribute information on women's rights at local markets on two separate occasions. By coincidence, on one of those occasions the MPLA was allowed to staff a table in the same location petitioned for by the Forum. MPLA representatives told Poloff that establishing a table at the market was a great way to reach out to new members.

Women Facing an Uphill Battle

¶7. (SBU) Despite the dedication of an entire month to highlight women's issues and rights, Angolan women are far from attaining status equal to their male counterparts. Female political leaders told Poloff that women are underrepresented at all levels of government, despite being generally better educated than a male population that spent more time on the battlefield than in the classroom. In the political sphere, Angola has yet to meet its signed commitment to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which stipulates 30% participation by women in

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Government, Parliament, the Judiciary and public administration. The Angolan Cabinet currently has 14% female representation and 12% representation in Parliament. The judicial sector has even lower representation, as only 6% of the positions in the sector are occupied by women. On a positive note, however, Angolan women continue to receive equal access to education and health care, where such social services are available.

¶8. (SBU) Many factors contribute to the absence of a greater number of women in Government and Public Administration, as well as in politics. Carolina Fortes, MPLA Central Committee member points towards cultural habits, which cast women in the role of homemakers, as the main reason for women not dedicating themselves to active public lives. Of the 126 political parties in Angola only one, the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD), has a female leader, and the majority of its rank and file members are also female. PLD President Analia Pereira told Emboffs that other major parties have failed to strongly address issues that matter to women, such as education, health care, childcare, and small-scale poverty reduction programs that have impact at the local level. Nonetheless, an IRI public opinion poll released in December 2006 said that 51% of Angolans would vote for a female candidate.

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